



Clifford Beers Clinic

Building Strength in Children and Families

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TO: MEMBERS OF THE APPROPRIATIONS COMMITTEE

**FROM: ALICE FORRESTER, PhD, EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR
CLIFFORD W. BEERS GUIDANCE CLINIC,
NEW HAVEN, GUILFORD & WEST HAVEN**

DATE: MARCH 11, 2010

RE: GOVERNOR RELL'S 3/1/10 DEFICIT MITIGATION PLAN

General Background regarding the Clifford W. Beers Child Guidance Clinics:

Dear Friends:

Our organization will soon be celebrating 100 years of providing professional and caring services to traumatized children and families in the Greater New Haven Area. Our work is very challenging and often very heart-wrenching, but we do it with pride and professionalism.

Our Clinic employs 85 full-time professionals, 41 of whom are members of the AFSCME Union. Our employees receive good health and retirement benefits. Most of our employees stay with us for their entire careers. We provide outpatient care and counseling from: two offices located in New Haven; one office in Guilford and one office in West Haven. We also provide care and counseling at two school-based clinics and our professionals frequently visit families at home to provide in-home care and counseling.

We are currently providing care to 3,200 children family members in the Greater New Haven area. Our total annual budget is about \$7M: 41% comes from state funding; 1% from federal funding; and 59% from the generous charitable contributions from members of the community. With a \$7M annual budget and 3,200 family members as clients, the annual cost of care is about \$2,200.00 per client.

About 70% of the children who come to the Clifford Beers Clinic are victims of severe trauma and/or abuse. After 6 months of treatment and care with our professional support, we are very happy that about 50% of these kids are generally not showing any continuing symptoms of the trauma and abuse, and these kids and their families can begin to live happier and more productive lives. Over time, most of our clients and their families start to feel better and overcome their horrible symptoms. We are very successful in our mission to help children and families!

The Clifford W. Beers Guidance Clinic, Inc.

From a cost-benefit perspective, The Clifford Beers Clinic is really helping families at an extremely low annual cost (about \$2,200 per person). This is compared to the cost of residential placement and care per person, which can be as high as about \$400,000 per child per year. Also, if a traumatized child eventually gets tangled up in our prison system (which is the case more often than not if the child does not receive proper care and counseling), then the annual cost for prison is about \$56,000 per person.

The Professionals with the Clifford Beers Clinic want to do more to help more children and more families. The demand for our services is sky-rocketing. We are respectfully asking the state to help us in our Mission. Please do whatever you can to help us with the state funding of our important programs.

Our Comments regarding Governor Rell's 2/3/10 Proposed Budget Adjustments and Governor Rell's 3/1/10 Proposed Deficit Mitigation Plan

Our comments apply to the 2/3/10 Budget Adjustment Proposal relating to the DCF Budget. Specifically, the Budget Proposal is summarized to state:

	<u>2010 - 2011</u>
Suspend Funding for Lower Priority Contract Service Types:	- \$4,156,124
Funding is suspended for various low priority, small, and/or miscellaneous grants: These grants include: . . . Assessment and Treatment in DCF Facilities - \$81,442, . . . Enhanced Care Coordination - \$1,933,104	

It appears to us that some of these proposed cuts have been again proposed in the 3/1/10 Deficit Mitigation Plan:

Item #5 in the "Expenditure Reductions" Section of the 3/1/10 Deficit Mitigation Plan states:
5.) DCF – Initiate Proposed FY 2011 Contract Suspensions in FY 2010 (\$1,124,614)

As we review the Governor's Mitigation plan I remember the Governor describing her vision and strategy behind her budget proposals for Fiscal Year 2010. I was then intrigued by her dream for Connecticut. She described the beautiful possibilities for the future with this budget. She believes that by making the proposed cuts and not raising taxes, the State will attract those business plagued with high taxes in other states. Those businesses drawn to Connecticut will create thousands of new jobs, which in turn will promote stronger families. These families will produce children who themselves will not want to leave the State, because there will be enough interesting and attractive jobs here. Brain drain will be alleviated and generations will thrive in Connecticut. I found myself appreciating the vision, and found myself hopeful for the future of Connecticut.

Then I had to go to work. I am the Executive Director of Clifford W. Beers Child Guidance Clinic in New Haven, one of those "private providers" of mental health services for the poorest citizens that were cut in that visionary deficit mitigation plan of the Governor. If accepted as is, Clifford Beers Clinic will receive a \$250,000 cut in contracts for services *that have already been provided*, and another \$80,000 in promised services for the children with mental health issues in the community.

For us, it is always Budget time. The economic crisis has hit us hard. Trying to fill holes in our \$7,000,000 budget, I spent my year living and breathing the line items in our budget. I found some interesting things: the funding we receive from the State to provide outpatient mental health services

for children and their families (90% of who we serve are on Husky) only pays 50% of the actual cost.

It is the Clinic's staff and Board responsibility to find the other 50% income to cover the services. We write multiple grants to fill the gap, all of which have their own agenda and responsibilities. We creatively sub-contract staff to do other jobs in the off time they are not seeing clients, running special events, galas and conferences, all to cover that gaping hole.

Our Board, all of whom are volunteers, personally give to the Clinic, beg their friends and family to buy yet another raffle ticket "for the kids" and sit sweating with us when we look over these numbers in Finance Committee. I have lost a lot of sleep these last months month thinking about the staff I had to lay off in October. We froze our pension plan, took furlough days, froze wages, not hired any new staff and pushed our current staff to do more.

Okay. I guess that's my job, as it is your job, to take the heat. As a non-profit with a mission based on the legacy and vision of our feisty founder Clifford Beers, we accept the challenge. Beers was a man with serious mental illness, who at the turn of the century, was horrified by his experience on the inpatient psychiatric wards and wrote a book about it to promote the idea that humanity should not have to endure such conditions. He spent his life trying to change mental health service provisions and believed every man and women should be able to receive humane treatment and at best try to receive treatment in their community surrounded by their friends and family.

Lucky for the 1500 children and their families we see in our outpatient clinic, the staff is infused with Beers' moral character and humanistic mission. In addition, like the children and families we serve, we are scrappy and creative...and we tackle the need to co-fund the services with optimism and hope. But the gap in the funding is growing larger, and the work we must do to fill the gap is exhausting. **It would be as if auto mechanics had to wait tables in order to buy the parts, to get to fix cars. We are really beginning to ask ourselves why it is that it is our responsibility to consistently pick up the slack of the State's responsibility to care for our neediest children.**

On this auspicious day of the release of the Governor's budget mitigation plan, I received a call from the front desk that there was a family in crisis in the waiting room. There I found a mother with her son, age 14, who was having a terrible anxiety attack. He reported he had suicidal thoughts related to the news that he will have to testify in a sexual abuse trial against his father, who molested all three of his children. This child and his siblings have been in treatment at the Clinic for over a year. The mother reported to me that their health has all three improved immensely; the boy was back in school, passing all of his classes, doing well at home, sleeping through the night. It was the news of the trial brought back his anxiety.

His mother reported that she lost her well-paying job at a large corporation in Connecticut the year before because of the children's mental health needs interfered with her ability to go to work. Since the children received treatment at Clifford Beers Clinic, their symptoms have disappeared and they were all stable, and the mom was able to get another job. The mom brought her son to the Clinic this morning because she was terrified for him, and worried that if he remained symptomatic she would have to miss her evening at work, and maybe lose her new job.

The child's therapist was on a well deserved vacation day. But due to the boys acute stress reaction, we called her at home. She spoke to the child and mother, offer her support and guidance. The child

calmed down noticeably. Our emergency crisis staff came and made the assessment that the child could stay at home; our therapist agreed to see the child later that morning and to set up a safety plan for the child and to continue the evidence based trauma treatment for the whole family. The clinician, still on her day off, contacted the court advocate and attorney to talk about planning for support for the family around the pending trial. The Medical Director saw the child as an emergency visit. The mother and child went home 4 hours later noticeably calmer and hopeful; the mother was able to go to her job that evening.

Here is a great example of a family the Governor wishes to grow into healthy contributing and sustaining citizens of Connecticut. We do not have to wait until new businesses are drawn to our State because of low taxes to find potentially successful employees. This mother had a well paying job, and three very smart children....she lost the job due to the need for her to take care of her children once the sexual abuse was discovered and her family was ripped apart by the disclosure. The mother reports, and our outcome data shows, that treatment from Clifford Beers Clinic helps sustain positive child development and promotes strong families. Six months in treatment at the clinic dramatically reduces trauma related symptoms and improves functioning of the child.

Now for a mere cost of \$1100 a year to the State (and another \$1100 raised by staff and Board) this family is on a road to recovery which frankly could have had serious and costly repercussions. Over 90% of the men and women sitting in prison are trauma survivors. Substance abuse, poor academic performance and drop out can be attributed to children exposed to traumatic childhood experiences. Research also shows that trauma exposure converts to long term health risks including diabetes, heart disease and obesity. Outpatient mental health interventions address and treat these serious mental health disturbances. The collaborative and community based mental health care supports children to meet their developmental milestones, have success at school and home, and allow their parents to attend work and raise contributing citizens in Connecticut.

\$320,000 maybe isn't a large cut in the light of the deficit. But "private providers" have filled the gap of providing State services for years. Another cut on top of the losses we suffered in this recession in our pension fund, in addition the increases we are facing in health care and unemployment taxes, the repercussions of the decrease in private donations, I am beginning to feel frayed and somewhat disheartened. I want Connecticut to grow and thrive with businesses and employment for all. I personally want to continue to employ every staff member at our Clinic in order to be there for those families in desperate need. I want to provide services so the mother in this story can work and provide for her children.

Let us pay attention to *what is*, as well as have a vision for *what can be*. Community providers contribute to the success of our families living and working in Connecticut. Consider carefully the burden the Governor proposed budget cuts does to our already underfunded budget. We believe that we must fund prevention and early intervention in order to stop crisis spending. If we aren't there when the call from a child in need comes in, we know that taxpayers will pay deeply for the missing services, now and long into the future. It is the responsibility of the legislators and Governor of this State to fully fund the deeply needed services, and NOT to place the burden and responsibility which is the States on "private providers."

THANK YOU ALL VERY MUCH FOR YOUR CONSIDERATION OF OUR POSITION.